

Planning Statement

Continued use of agricultural building for mixed use of agriculture and log processing and storage

**Gorsty Hill Farm, Gorsty Hill Road, Upper Tean,
Staffordshire , ST10 4EL**

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Project	Gorsty Hill Farm, Gorsty Hill Road, Upper Tean
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1 Introduction

- 1.1 JMI Planning is a Midlands based town planning consultancy. Its directors are chartered town planners with over 30 years' combined experience in both the public and private sector.
- 1.2 The author of this appraisal, Jim Malkin, has worked as a principal planning officer in development control in local government, and more recently as a planning consultant in the private sector. He has extensive knowledge of the planning system and experience of the appeals process. He is a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute.
- 1.3 This statement forms part of a detailed planning application for the continued use of an agricultural building for a mixed use of agriculture and log processing and storage.

2 Site and Planning History

- 2.1 Gorsty Hill Farm is located on the outskirts of Upper Tean and comprises of a modern portal framed agricultural building, alongside the farmhouse and associated traditional barn.
- 2.2 The farm has recently been inherited by the applicants Rob and Heidi Stevenson, having been a tenant of their late uncle for more than 15 years. The farm has been a major influence on Rob's life, who has visited the farm, assisting his late Uncle and Aunt since the age of 12. Rob and Heidi have embarked on a scheme of improvements to the holding to modernise the farm. This has ensured safer working practices, significantly improved animal welfare and the overall appearance of the farm. The improvements included the replacement of a range of dilapidated farm buildings which were replaced with the application building, alongside this, a new yard and cattle holding area have been created. In addition, consent has been

granted for the replacement of the existing farmhouse. A list of recent consents is included in the table below:

SMD/2023/0180	Replacement of existing cattle sheds with new modern cattle building
SMD/2023/0185	Replacement of existing farm storage and cattle buildings with new farm storage barn and associated works
SMD/2024/0276	Proposed replacement dwelling

- 2.3 Surrounding land is predominantly in agricultural use, with the western boundary bordering a disused quarry. The nearest residential property, other than the associated dwelling occupied by the applicant, lies approximately 160 metres to the north-east.

3 The Proposed Development

- 3.1 The applicant log business has been in operation from the holding for in excess of 15 years alongside their agricultural activities. On this basis the applicants believed that processing, seasoning and storing the logs within the building was not an issue. They do however appreciate that on the basis that the building is a new structure that they should have sought consent before utilising the building.
- 3.2 This application seeks to regularise the use of the modern barn for a mix of livestock housing, agricultural storage and in association with the log business.
- 3.3 To provide context to the proposal's, logs had been processed outside the old range of buildings, stored under the old haybarn to dry (a process that is required before it could be used as firewood) and distributed from the site by the applicants more than 15 years alongside associated agricultural activities. The outdoor space was also

utilised for surplus stock to start the drying process and the storage of empty cages.

- 3.4 To expedite the drying the applicant has been storing log cages within the application building, which has significantly reduced the drying time. Storing the cages undercover allows the logs to be sold much quicker. Therefore, minimising the peaks and troughs of the only other source of the farm's income, from cattle sales. The overall appearance of the farm has also benefited from the reduction of unsightly empty cages in the outdoor spaces. The applicant seasons the logs in a sustainable manner without using industrial kilns for drying, thereby reducing the carbon footprint of their operations.

4 Planning Policy Context

National Planning Policy Framework

- 4.1 Paragraph 11 of the NPPF establishes a presumption in favour of sustainable development, stating the following:

Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

For decision-taking this means:

- c) *approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or*
- d) *where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date⁸, granting permission unless:*
 - i. *the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or*

- ii. *any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.*

4.2 Paragraph 85 of the NPPF states the following:

Planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development. The approach taken should allow each area to build on its strengths, counter any weaknesses and address the challenges of the future. This is particularly important where Britain can be a global leader in driving innovation, and in areas with high levels of productivity, which should be able to capitalise on their performance and potential.

4.3 Paragraph 88 of the NPPF states the following and seeks to support a prosperous rural economy:

Planning policies and decisions should enable:

- a) *the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed, beautiful new buildings;*
- b) *the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;*
- c) *sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside; and*
- d) *the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship.*

Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy (2014)

4.4 “R1 – Rural Diversification

All development in the rural areas outside the development boundaries of the towns and villages will be assessed according to the extent to which it enhances the character, appearance and biodiversity of the countryside, promotes the sustainable diversification of the rural economy, facilitates economic activity, meets a rural community need and sustains the historic environment.

Appropriate development should not harm the rural character and environmental quality of the area, or any sites designated for their nature conservation, or historical interest by virtue of the scale, nature and level of activity involved and the type and amount of traffic generated or by other effects such as noise and pollution.

Wherever possible development should be within suitably located buildings which are appropriate for conversion. Where new or replacement buildings are involved, development should have minimal impact on the countryside and be in close proximity to an existing settlement.

Within the Green Belt, inappropriate development which is otherwise acceptable within the terms of this policy, will still need to be justified by very special circumstances.

Priority will be given to the re-use of rural buildings for commercial enterprise, including tourism uses, where the location is sustainable and the proposed use does not harm the building’s character and/or the character of its surroundings.”

5 Planning Considerations

Principle of Development

- 5.1 The application site lies outside of the Upper Tean settlement boundary. Policy R1 of the Core Strategy is therefore relevant.
- 5.2 Policy R1 is broadly supportive of new economic development in the countryside, subject to it having no adverse effect upon the character and environmental quality of its surroundings or the amenities enjoyed by neighbouring land users.
- 5.3 Furthermore, Paragraph 88 of the National Planning Policy Framework supports business and enterprise in rural areas. It is clear, therefore, that the Government accepts this type of development can be appropriate in the countryside.
- 5.4 The processing, storage and drying of logs on a commercial scale is a land intensive use which tends to dictate a countryside as opposed to urban location, and it is one that can sit acceptably alongside existing agricultural uses. Furthermore, forestry and associated uses tend to be synonymous with rural areas. The log business sits alongside existing agricultural uses on the site is therefore considered to be appropriate within the countryside.
- 5.5 As set out above, the log business has been operating, alongside agricultural activities, from Gorsty Hill Farm for in excess of 15 years, the only discernible difference is that now the processing and storage of logs takes place within part of the agricultural building. The extent of the areas of building used for each element is very fluid and depends on the number of logs in the yard / the need for animal housing and general agricultural storage at the time.
- 5.6 Policy R1 of the Core Strategy expresses a preference for the re-use of existing buildings. This scheme follows this preference and utilises the existing agricultural building for mixed use purposes rather than any new build.

- 5.7 The use of the building for the processing and storage of logs removes them from the yard areas, where predominantly they have been previously, and still could lawfully be. This provides a significant benefit to the wider appearance of the countryside.
- 5.8 The mixed use of the existing building for the log business and agricultural purposes therefore clearly complies with the relevant requirements of policy R1 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy, and the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Character and Appearance of the Countryside

- 5.9 The scheme makes use of the existing building which is a modern agricultural structure typically found within the district. The use of this building ensures that all operations in relation to the processing, seasoning and storage of logs is now undertaken within the building, thereby removing all outside storage that could be considered to have a detrimental impact on the wider landscape.

Amenity of Neighbours

- 5.10 Gorsty Hill Farm is a relatively isolated holding with the nearest residential properties located some 160m away from the farm. The use of the building for log processing is not intrinsically noisy and will not result in any adverse impacts on the reasonable amenities of the occupiers of neighbouring properties.
- 5.11 It is also important to note that mixed agricultural and log operations have taken place on the farm for a significant period without any issues or concerns being raised by the occupiers of nearby properties.

Highway Safety

- 5.12 Paragraph 115 of the National Planning Policy Framework states that development *‘should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe’*.
- 5.13 There are limited movements associated with the log use, with all logs being delivered from farm by Mr Stevenson on a small flat-bed lorry. On a typical week 15 deliveries will take place, with obviously more deliveries in the colder months. This number is very minor and will clearly not have a ‘severe’ impact on highway safety in the locality.
- 5.14 This number of movements have been ongoing for number of years and the regularisation of the mixed use of the building will not impact on the number of vehicle journeys from the farm.
- 5.15 It should also be noted that no direct sales of logs to visiting members of the public takes place at the farm.

Other Matters

- 5.16 The regularisation of the use of the building will not impact on protected species or their habitats. In addition, as the application seeks to regularise the mixed use of an existing building there is no need to meet mandatory BNG requirements.

6 Conclusions

- 6.1 The application proposes the regularisation of the use of an existing farm building for a mixed use of agriculture and log processing, seasoning and storage. The holding is not sustainable purely raising beef alone. The existing diversification into log sales has ensured longevity of the farm.

- 6.2 Policy R1 of the Core Strategy and Paragraph 88 of the NPPF establish the principle of new development in rural areas to support the rural economy. It is therefore clear that the Council and the Government accept that such development can be appropriate in the countryside.
- 6.3 The use of the building provides a safe location for the processing of logs which is not open to the elements, whilst also expediting the drying process allowing logs to be sold much quicker. Therefore, minimising the peaks and troughs of the only other source of the farm's income, from cattle sales. The seasoning of the logs in a sustainable manner without using industrial kilns for drying reduces the carbon footprint of this element of the business.
- 6.4 The use of the building does not harm the character or appearance of the countryside, or will it impact on the amenities enjoyed by the occupiers of neighbouring dwellings whilst also not prejudicing the safe and efficient use of the highway network.
- 6.5 The proposal therefore constitutes sustainable development which accords with Policies R1 and SD2 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy and the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 6.6 In accordance with the presumption in favour of such development established by Paragraph 11 of the National Planning Policy Framework, and the significant weight attached to economic development prescribed by Paragraphs 85 and 88, it is therefore respectfully requested that the application be approved.